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The Use of the Margin

By Edward Howard Griggs

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The Art of Life Series

The Use of the Margin

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

THE NEW HUMANISM

A BOOK OF MEDITATIONS

MORAL EDUCATION

HUMAN EQUIPMENT

42

THE ART OF LIFE SERIES

Edward Howard Griggs, Editor

The Use of the Margin

BY

EDWARD HOWARD GRIGGS

23346

WITH AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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Introduction to the Series

Of all problems, those of human living are most absorbingly interesting, just because they never reach a final solution. In all our living is an unavoidable element of experiment. If we wait until we know how to live before we begin, we never begin. If we do not make friends until we know all about the laws of friendship and all the subtle elements involved in the adjustment of one personality to another, we die friendless. If we do not choose a vocation until we know all the laws determining the active expression of our capacities in some avenue of work, we fail to find our call.

Thus it is necessary to dare something courageously in all actively growing human life. The most we can hope for is light enough to take the next step; and

then we must take it bravely, trusting that, if we do, the light will still be one step in advance.

This element of experiment in all human living means that life can never be reduced to exact science, but will always belong in the field of art. Now art is the most discouraging and the most exalting thing we know: the most discouraging because we never come to an end, every achievement being only a new failure on the basis of which we must try again. But art is also the most exalting thing we know—for exactly the same reason: we may always do better if we try; we reach no finished conclusion; each attainment is an inspiration to fresh endeavor, and we may go on limitlessly in the growth of the spirit through the succession of forms.

Science, moreover, can be taught; but art must be learned in practice. Granted a good mind in teacher and student, the facts and laws of science may be given

over from one mind to another; but the most that a teacher of art can hope to accomplish is to suggest and stimulate activity and, by the sparing use of criticism, correct faults, while the art must be acquired by the student solely through his own effort and activity.

May we not add that the highest and most universal fine art, gathering up all the others under itself and giving them place and meaning, is the art of living? The most glorious picture ever painted is in the color of life, on the background of time and nature, in the shape of a good deed. The most wonderful of songs, beyond all that ever came from brain of poet or lips of singer, is made up of melodious days in the sweet harmony of a beautiful lifetime.

The aim of this series of brief books is to illuminate this never-to-be-finished art of living. There is no thought of solving the problems or giving dogmatic theories of conduct. Rather the purpose

is to bring together in brief form the thoughts of some wise minds and the insight and appreciation of some deep characters, trained in the actual world of experience but attaining a vision of life in clear and wide perspective. Such books should act as a challenge to the reader's own mind, bringing him to a clearer recognition of the problems of his life and the laws governing them, deepening his insight into the wonder and meaning of life and developing an attitude of appreciation that may make possible the wise and earnest facing of the deeps, dark or beautiful, in the life of the personal spirit.

The Use of the Margin

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PERHAPS the most significant characteristic in the modern development of education has been the extension of the period of culture in the life of the individual. In the one direction it has been extended into the Kindergarten age and beyond to the school at the mother's knee; in the other direction we have pushed it forward to the limit of life itself. Thoughtful people no longer speak of "finishing" their education: each day of life is recognized as getting part of its best meaning as a fresh opportunity of education. We realize that if growth of mind and spirit ceases, life is really at an end, even if physical existence continue for a time.

With this extension of the period of culture has come a changed meaning in

the word education, resulting in its use in two widely different senses at the present time. In the more limited view we mean by education the initiation of the child into some part of the gathered-up experience of the race. This capital from the human past is represented by science and art; and our aim in the ordinary school-process is to equip the child with some part of this capital, so that he may start well on in the business of life and not have to learn every lesson by the hard, slow path of experience.

In the larger, vaguer use of the word, education means much more than this, namely, the whole development of character, intelligence, appreciation and power that comes through human living. This life-education is not achieved mainly in the schools: on the contrary it comes from the experiences and activities of life itself, while the function of the school is merely supplementary. There are, indeed, two schoolmasters at whose feet

we sit day after day, and from whom we receive by far the larger part of our life-culture: they are, Love and Work—the relationships we sustain to other individuals and the vocation through which we express ourselves and make our contribution to the world. Not only are these the channels through which comes the best of our education, but our ability as men and women to draw deeply from the life of the past depends largely upon the development we receive through the more fundamental influences of love and work.

Now all human beings have access to these most significant channels of education. It is true, some are blessed with much deeper and richer opportunities of life than others, but the humblest and most restricted of us lives in some degree the great, typical experiences of humanity. That is the wonder of life, that the universe centers in each individual and each is an organizing center for

infinity and eternity. Every human being is surrounded by a little world of other persons to whom he is bound by ties, stronger or weaker; while the most unfortunate has some opportunity, seldom if ever exhausted, for culture and service through work. What then explains the wide difference in the culture received by various individuals through these primary channels of experience? One man will settle down into the routine of his calling, digging the ruts deeper each day, until he quite loses power to see out from them; another, in the same vocation, shows an ability to make each day's work a source of new growth in power and in appreciation. So, one human being will rest passively on the fact of some well-established love or friendship, and thus lose after a time the beauty of the relationship and the meaning it once possessed for his life; while another actively woos the love of his friend every day, and so finds deep

ever opening below deep in the relationship, with an ever fresh realization of the truth and wonder of life.

The reason why these opposite results may come from the same opportunities of life is found chiefly in a third aspect of the problem of culture—the one I wish to consider here. After all, it is relatively slight margins of difference between men that determine success or failure in all phases of life All human beings are much more alike than they are different from each other. Raise just a little the quality of manhood expressed in any avenue of life, and you multiply many times the result finally achieved. You recall the definition of wealth and poverty as consisting respectively in being fifty dollars ahead and fifty dollars behind. That is just it: indeed, the amount might be considerably lessened. One who is a few dollars ahead can economize, buying when the price is low, supplying what is soon to

be needed in advance of the actual demand for it. On the other hand, one who is a few dollars behind must buy in small quantities in the dearest market, procuring only what is immediately indispensable. Such an one has no possible chance to economize nor to procure in advance the slight comforts that so largely determine the ease and satisfaction of life. Thus a slight change in the relation of income to expenditure may turn the scale of life from success to failure or from failure to success.

The same law holds with reference to all our problems; and thus the business of living—the true vocation of man—is much like any lesser undertaking. In any business there is a certain basis of capital on which it proceeds. On this basis is an income, of which a large part must be used merely in paying running expenses; but in any business that is not a failure there is some margin of profit, the use of which determines, in the long run,

the success of the undertaking. Is the margin carelessly wasted, or is it, in part at least, converted into the capital of the business? That is the important question with reference to the final outcome of the whole activity.

So is it with the vocation of living. We come into the world with a certain capital of health, character, intelligence, talent, power. The initial capital is not of our choosing; yet, constantly changing as it is under the influence of action and experience, it is the basis on which we do business in the vocation of life. We have, moreover, a definite income; and in one aspect at least the universe has been just to us: we have just twenty-four hours a day income from God; and the wonderful thing about this income in time is that we can save it only by spending it. If we would save our dollars and our pennies we must put them away, not spending them in the ordinary routine of life; but if we would save our hours and

our moments we must spend them, and the more completely they are spent for ends that are worth while, the more they are converted into the capital of character, intelligence and power.

We must all, moreover, spend a large part of our income merely in paying running expenses in the business of life, that is, in making a living. Whether we are rich or poor, with inherited property or without, the first duty of man is to square accounts, to leave the world as well off as one found it; and, indeed, he who fails to contribute *in some form* to society as much as he takes from it has failed of ordinary honesty and is to be regarded as a pauper or a thief whatever his wealth may be. Thus the demand that each should pay running expenses in the business of life is universal; yet for all except those at the bottom of our society, on whom its industrial structure rests most pitilessly, there is some margin of time each is free to spend as he

pleases; and, as in any other business, the use of the margin goes far in determining the ultimate success or failure in the business of life.

First of all, it is in the use of the margin that we are most free. It takes two to make a friendship: in every personal relationship one is subject partly to the action of wills other than one's own. Even in the problem of the vocation natural capacity and choice are not alone to be considered. One must consider what the world demands or needs, and so work constantly in response to objective factors beyond one's control. In the use of the margin, on the other hand, we are free to follow our own choice and desire with no compulsion from external forces. That is why the use of the margin so wonderfully tests character. If love is the power that most fully calls out all the potentialities of one's being, and so tests more deeply than any other challenge of life all that one has been and

all that one is, it is the way one uses the margin that shows the line of movement and reveals the ideal. When we do what we like to do, because we like it, we show what we really care for more completely than at any other time. Thus state how you use the margin, the time that is yours to spend as you please, and it will not be difficult to tell what, sometime, you are going to be. Goethe understood this, and when he wished to show the meaning in the lives of the common people, he portrayed them, in the second scene of *Faust,* not on the six days of routine work under the compulsion of the wills of others, but on the one Easter holiday when they stream out through the city gates into the woods and fields, doing what they like to do because they like it, and so showing the ends toward which their lives really move. It is so with the individual or with the mass of men. If you would understand London, go to Hampstead Heath on Bank Holiday and

then to some one of the five hundred music halls of London in the evening. Would you know the spirit of Paris, sit down at one of the boulevard sidewalk cafés and watch the people come and go, and then attend one of the characteristic theaters of Paris in the evening. It is in the time used freely in response to desire that men show the purpose of their lives.

The use of the margin is, further, our one great opportunity to change the quality of our lives. Men differ from each other in quality rather than in quantity of life. It is true, some are granted more years than others; but after all that is not so important. One would rather *live* a year than *vegetate* for a century, though I grant you it would be better to live for a hundred years than for one, if we could be sure we were living all the time and not simply staying above the ground. Yet everyone interprets life in terms of its quality rather than its quantity. Looking back over the past one

often finds a day or a week standing out longer in memory than years that preceded and followed it. It was longer, in significance, one lived more, and so the day had deeper meaning for the spirit than years of mere routine existence. We have lived, not so many days and years, but so much work and love and struggle and joy and heart-ache. Life is always measured in terms of its quality by the standards of the soul.

There is, moreover, one most encouraging and consoling law in human development: we grow, not in an arithmetical, but in a geometrical ratio, the increment of new life being multiplied into the old and not simply added to it. A new thought achieved is not added to the sum of one's past thinking, but multiplied into it, becoming a new point of view, from which one sees in changed perspective all other facts and ideas. One step up the mountain widens the horizon in all directions.

A slight study of mathematics will show that even a large factor multiplied into zero will give zero; while a quite small factor multiplied successively into a series of others gives a large result in a comparatively short time. Thus, unless there is some appreciable increment of new life each day the result is quickly stagnation and spiritual death. We keep the good of the old day by vitalizing it with the new. It is no more possible to be good by yesterday's virtue or wise by yesterday's thinking than to live by yesterday's fresh air and sunshine and nourishing food. The new days must bring its own step forward of life; and, when it does, the past is just so much power to take the step.

It is thus the increment of new life multiplied into the old that so largely determines the whole product of life, as far as it is within our own control. We can no longer change yesterday: it arches over us as fate, but we can influence

decidedly the factor of to-day's life which is multiplied into the whole achievement of the past.

That is why the margin of time we have to spend as we please is so sacred; and the briefer the margin, the more precious it becomes. If you have ten hours a day to spend as you please, you may perhaps afford to waste an hour of it—perhaps; but if you have only half an hour each day at your own free disposal, that half-hour becomes a sacred opportunity of life, the chance to change the quality of your existence, to multiply the capital on which you are doing business in the vocation of living. And yet there are people foolish enough to talk of doing something to "pass the time," or—wickedly—even to "kill time"! Think of it: carelessly abandoning or willfully murdering one's own potential life!

No, the river of time sweeps on with regular, remorseless current. There are

hours when we would give all we possess if we could but check the flow of its waters, there are other hours when we long to speed them more rapidly; but desire and effort alike are futile. Whether we work or sleep, are earnest or idle, rejoice or moan in agony, the river of time flows on with the same resistless flood; and *it is only while the water of the river of time flows over the mill-wheel of to-day's life that we can utilize it.* Once it is past, it is in the great, unreturning sea of eternity. Other opportunities will come, other waters will flow; but that which has slipped by unused is lost utterly and will return not again.

The truth I am expressing is obvious: everyone knows it, but, unfortunately, few apply it. We live only one moment—that which is passing. No matter how long eternity might stretch out, life would still be only in the passing moment. To be sure, man's instant dif-

fers from the brute's in that it "looks before and after." The brute lives in a moment that excludes past and future; while man, reaching back through memory and history to the inclusion of the remotest past, and on through hope and aspiration to a share in the unborn future that is to be, lives an instant that may fuse all time in its breast. Nevertheless, we live but one moment—this that is swiftly passing. People are foolish enough to imagine that a sum of nothings will give something, but their arithmetic is sadly at fault. The result expresses only what is in the units that compose it: a sum of wasted days will not give a year that is worth while, and a sum of wasted years will not give a significant lifetime. Thus, the result in the whole depends upon our use of the passing moment: it is our chance to live—our only one.

This does not mean that all the margin should be spent in hard work: on the contrary, the best part of it should be

spent in play. The need is only that each moment should count to the full for life. Aristotle showed long ago that play is the one perfect form of human action, and hence is more valuable even than work for the attainment of the highest ends of the spirit. Work is compelled action, play is free, spontaneous action. The compulsion in work may be due to the necessities of existence, the wills of others, or it may come from the assertion of our own will seeking significant ends, but always some such force is present; while when we play the natural powers of body and mind flow forth in joyous, free and spontaneous expression. The best part of the margin should therefore be spent in play; but in play that is not merely diversion or distraction. It is a serious commentary on how we play that we use such words for it, as if we wanted to be turned aside from the earnest interests of life. True play is recreation: the creation anew of forces of mind and body

through their normal expression. Such play is the running of a child in the fresh morning sunshine, the response to the beautiful in art, the enjoyment of love and friendship.

To play well, in this sense, one must have worked well. If, in the child, play precedes work, with the adult the free spontaneous action is possible only after the hard, compelled one. If you would find the most miserable people in the world, go, not to the wretched ones caught in the cog-wheels of a remorseless industrial machine, but to the blasé, world-weary people who, with vast opportunity, have refused ever to do anything they did not like to do, and so end by going over the face of the earth vainly seeking to escape the shadow of their own disgust. While if the rhythm of life is kept sane, the harder we wrestle with the severe problem of work, the greater is our power to enjoy the opportunities of true play.

Dante understood the problem: all the way down those darkening corridors of the Inferno and all the way up the ever-brightening terraces of the mountain of purification, there is just one lesson taught over and over again to Dante by Virgil: "*Pensa che questo dì mai non raggiorna*"—"Think that this day will never dawn again." Climb, even if your limbs are weary and your breath comes short. Now is your chance to strive, soon it will be gone. But when Dante comes out on the top of the mountain into the garden of rest and peace, Virgil's word is no longer "Think that this day will never dawn again"; rather it is:

"Take thine own pleasure for thy guide henceforth;

. . .

Free and upright and sound is thy free-will,
And evil were it not to do its bidding,
Thee o'er thyself I therefore crown and mitre!"

That is, I make you your own emperor and your own pope, your own sovereign in temporal and spiritual worlds alike,

because you love the best thing best, and the next in its place, and so on through all the succession of goods answering human desire. Thus, loving all things only in God, Dante has become of those Wordsworth calls:

"Glad hearts! without reproach or blot;
Who do thy work [Duty] and know it not."

So Dante represents himself as wandering in the beautiful garden, listening to the bird-songs and to the spheric melody the wind wakens in the pine-forest, waiting, resting, playing, until the bright call of Beatrice comes to lift him in flight beyond flight into the very heart of the light in the celestial paradise. It is a fair symbol of human life: two worlds of hard, compelled action, one of free, spontaneous action; and the third comes only after the other two and partly because of them.

If the highest use of the margin is thus in play, one grows increasingly skeptical

as to "overwork." I have yet to see a student suffer merely from too much work, while one often sees students so alarmed by some anæmic medical adviser that they never dare work to the limit of their power; and yet all work below that level does not educate us as it might. If one could die of overwork it would not be the most inglorious of ends. I, for one, would far rather die of overwork than be scared to death. What really harms, however, is not work, but work mixed up with insane physical habits or work with worry. Worry is always one of two things: it is idiocy or insanity. You may take your choice, there is no third. Worry depresses the physical vitality, destroys courage, dims the vision of the ideal, weakens the will, stands in the way of realizing anything worth while; and the human being who hopes to accomplish something will get worry under his feet at the earliest possible moment. Work, on the other hand,

good, honest, hard work, when in right relation, builds vitality and gives increased power.

The difficulty is, not that people work too much, but that they fail to apply the great open secrets of wonderful accomplishment in work. It is noteworthy that all the great secrets of human living are open secrets: everyone knows them; men of genius apply them. For example: everyone knows it is impossible to think without fresh air; and yet it is only within twenty or thirty years that we have been building our school-houses with reference to ventilation. We used, in cold weather, to close doors and windows and heap up a big fire in the stove, and then, when the children became drowsy and stupid, we whipped them—surely not a very logical method of developing intelligence! The difficulty was less lack of knowledge than failure to apply what everyone knew. So is it with all the great problems of human life.

What are the open secrets of wonderful accomplishment in work that men such as Leonardo da Vinci and Goethe peculiarly understood and applied? Consider what either of those myriad-minded men accomplished. Leonardo we think of as a painter: accidentally he was so. In his time painting was the great avenue of expression, and men of genius were naturally drawn into it. Really, Leonardo was a scientist: he cared to trace nature to her lair, to discover her at work in her own laboratory. We are told he would follow a grotesque or ugly face for miles—as far as he would a beautiful one. Once he had caught its secret, drawn it, he was careless of making a picture, of leaving behind a finished work of art. He was, further, a philosopher; he wrote treatises on drawing and painting; invented a new method of writing; taught a generation of artists; invented musical instruments and played wonderfully upon them; carried out

great engineering works; was the friend and counsellor of princes and statesmen; wrote masques for the Court at Milan; superintended their production: Leonardo, like Goethe, did enough in any one of half-a-dozen fields to justify his place in the world as a man of genius. How did he achieve it all in one brief lifetime?

There are, I believe, two great open secrets that explain the achievement of men such as Leonardo and Goethe. The first is so simple you may be surprised when I state it: it is—*concentration*—putting all the mind you have on the task in hand while you do it, and when that is no longer possible, turning to something else. I suppose everyone imagines he understands this: try it, the next book you read—not the next mass of printed pages, but the next book seriously challenging your thought. If you have not practised recently the art of conscious concentration, you will perhaps find that five

or ten minutes is as long as you can hold your mind intensely and actively on the task in hand. Stop then, and go out to take a walk; return and try again. In a month you will have multiplied the time you can work in that intense fashion. In a year, you have changed the quality of your intellectual life, which is as good as multiplying the quantity. To live with twice the significance is worth at least as much as living twice as long.

One ought never to read merely passively, unless the purpose be to respond to artistic beauty. Where knowledge and ideas are the end in view it is absurd to read every word on every page. Suppose, for example, one takes up what is to one a new field of reading: let me say Sociology. The first book one takes up must be read through word for word. The second, however, repeats in facts and ideas a considerable portion of the first; and when a dozen books have been mastered, the

next contains comparatively little that has not already been learned. To read that next volume as the first in the field was read is simply to waste human life. One must learn to read actively, to see at a glance what a page contains that one does not already know, to divine from index, preface and table of contents what a volume contains that is worth study.

There is an interesting story told of Napoleon when he was a boy at the military school. It is said he attempted a certain mathematical problem that no teacher or pupil in the school had ever been able to solve. He isolated himself in his room for seventy-two hours, and came out with the problem solved. Now that was not a wise thing to do: if the problem had not given way, in time Napoleon's physical constitution would, and it was seriously endangering his health to work for seventy-two hours upon one problem. Yet the power of concentration and force of will that made

it possible for Napoleon to hold his mind for so long a time continuously upon one problem was the force of will and energy of character that swept all Europe with the armies of France and changed the map of the world; and I have often thought if you and I could bring to bear upon the causes in which we believe such energy, character and force of will, what might we not accomplish? We could change, not the map of Europe, but the spiritual aspects of the life of mankind.

Every college teacher understands my meaning. The student comes in the morning saying: "I spent four hours on my lesson yesterday," and the poor instructor groans inwardly. For what does the student's complaint mean? Is it that he actually worked four hours on the lesson at the top of his bent, and perhaps failed to get it? If so, one of these results follows: either the student does not belong in that class or the instructor was criminal. Does it mean,

on the other hand, that the student sat at the window, with an apple and a book; ate a little and read a little; looked out the window, vaguely wondering why Miss Brown was walking with Mr. Jones, and whether he would get through in time for the party in the evening; and then glanced at the clock to note that four hours had passed? On investigation with my own students, I found it usually the second case and not the first. To say that you spent four hours on a lesson means nothing: how much intellectual energy did you spend? Did you work for one half-hour with all your might? I have known students to go through the common schools and the high school and graduate from college, without ever once in their entire student life working for fifteen minutes at the top of their intellectual power; and yet it is only such work that develops the mind in the highest degree. Thus the first open secret of wonderful

achievement is concentration; and it is one that can be learned and applied in the wise use of the margin.

The second secret, even more than the first, is the one such men as Leonardo and Goethe have especially understood, and whose consistent application explains their astounding achievement. It is the secret of turning from one form of action to another, without wasteful friction, and making the second action rest you from the first. Again you say, "how simple, and how universally understood." Yes! but how seldom consistently practised! Take an example again from the field of intellectual life where the application of this principle should be especially evident: what day in the week are there the poorest lessons in every school in America? Monday morning; and it is worse in the college than in the primary grade. Why? Surely Monday morning, when the college student has had Friday evening, all

day Saturday, not to mention Sunday, in which to get his lessons, should show the best work of the week. Yet habitually the student comes unprepared. Give him a few hours of regular mill-wheel grind, and he does fairly well; but give him plenty of time and opportunity, and he fails to use it. There is no excuse: it is mere dead inertia; and if you want the plainer word for inertia, it is laziness.

Again, what three weeks in the year are there the poorest lessons in every college in America? I have studied the question somewhat; and I am not quite sure whether it is the last three before the summer vacation, or the first three in the autumn, after its close; but I think it is the latter. Yet surely, after the long summer vacation the student should return so refreshed by other forms of activity that the opening weeks of the term should be the most valuable of his year. He has been to the sea-shore or the mountains; or he has been working on

a threshing machine, selling books to an unsuspecting public or doing some other semi-honorable labor to get money for his next year's course; and thus he should turn again to intellectual work with splendid vigor and make the first days count to the full. Yet the student complains: "It takes me a month to get back into my studies." He should be ashamed to make such a dishonorable confession until he has done his best to conquer the fault. Again, there is no excuse for the failure: it is due to mere inertia—laziness.

Next to the first three weeks in the autumn it is the last three before the summer vacation that are most nearly wasted in every college in our land. We do what we can to hold the student up to the end: refuse degrees and credits unless he remains faithfully; multiply examinations that should have been obsolete long ago, and resort to all manner of petty tricks. It does little good; the

last weeks the work ravels out and goes to pieces. And it is not that we close too late: if we stopped three weeks earlier it would be the same. It is that because we are going to stop soon we begin to let go in advance, and so waste the last part of one action and the first part of the next in mere useless friction.

What place on the program of a ministers' meeting or a teachers' meeting does every speaker dread? The last half hour before closing. Now ministers and teachers are unusually cultivated people with a relatively high degree of self-control; yet even with such hearers, the fact that the audience is to go soon makes it begin to leave some time in advance. Even if people are too courteous actually to get up and go out, their minds wander, they go in spirit; and thus, again, waste the last part of the one form of action and the first part of the next, through carelessness. It is so with a Wagner opera or a Shakespeare

drama. To be sure, there is the suburbanite, with his pitiless last train, and it is not pleasant to stay unprepared in the city overnight in evening dress. Watch, however, the people who spoil the last twenty minutes of noble music or impressive drama: they do not look like suburbanites, but are rather the people who because they are to go soon begin going now, and so injure the joy and culture of themselves and of their neighbors.

I have been making some observations of people who travel, and have come to the conclusion that enough time is wasted on railway trains and at railway stations to carry on all the educational activities of America if that time could be utilized with some degree of intelligence. I do not refer to the people who loaf about the stations: let us assume that they are hopeless and beneath consideration; but to those who are there for some serious purpose. Your train, for example, is late: what do you do? Walk up and

down the platform, examine your watch, ask the agent if the train is near: it will not put steam in the boiler, bring the train a moment sooner; it is cultivating a kind of nervous prostration, letting your energy run off uselessly in every direction. Your train comes; you enter it for the hours of your journey; you cannot read much without hurting your eyes; nature goes by, stimulating to your imagination: it is one of the best occasions in the world to think. Yet what do people do? They buy a later and later edition of some sensational newspaper just to keep from thinking—to let the mind be titillated by a series of vagrant fancies and reports of incidents that come and go. Thank heaven they go! Think what it would be if they all stayed in the mind. The fault is again mere careless failure to use the full opportunity for one action, and turn from it, without wasteful friction, to the next.

Both secrets of wonderful achieve-

ment might be summed up in Goethe's maxim: *"Ohne Hast, ohne Rast"*— "Unhasting, Unresting" — to work without the heedless waste that defeats its own end, yet with never the rest of idleness, finding refreshment in changed activity—such is the secret of great achievement.

Yet between man and what he hopes to accomplish in either work or play may intervene a third element—dissipation. When the word is used, do not imagine that mere insane physical habits are meant: they are bad enough, and the ruin they cause is only too obvious; but dissipation in any aspect of life means the same thing—wasting one's capital stock. One should spend one's income, as we have seen—all of it; but the man who gets to spending his capital is headed for bankruptcy. Nature never forgives: the word forgiveness is not written in her vocabulary. If you spend the capital of physical health you go into

some degree of physical bankruptcy; if you waste the capital of mental, emotional or moral health, in the same way you invite bankruptcy. It is true, other capital may be won, wasted opportunities may not abrogate new chances; but the drafts we make always come due and must be paid relentlessly.

There are certain forms of dissipation especially menacing at the present time because growing on us as a people. One of the worst of them in the intellectual world has already been hinted—the misuse of newspapers. I believe in newspapers: they serve two ends: they are our forum for current opinion and our text-book of current history. No one can be aware of what the world is doing and thinking without making use of newspapers. On the other hand, it is an unusually good newspaper that is worth more than twenty minutes of the day of a busy man or woman; and to spend all the time one has for intellec-

tual culture in going aimlessly over the list of crimes and casualties in the newspapers is to cultivate a dangerous form of intellectual dissipation, sure in the long run to destroy the power of logical thinking altogether.

Great editors have understood this: we are told that, with scarcely an exception, each has cultivated some one field of scientific investigation. That is, the great editor has been so conscious that his work of going over all the chaotic events of the world, with the aim of bringing them into some order and giving the semi-digested result to his readers, was intellectually disintegrating, that he followed, aside from his vocation, some one strong intellectual interest capable of giving order and unity to his mind. What is true of the editor is true in a measure of his readers; and while there are times when it may be justifiable to enter on an intellectual debauch—even to take a Sunday newspaper and spend

two hours in going over, in a half-somnolent fashion, all the fact, invention and fancy it contains—to make such an opiate the daily bread of the intellectual life is, in the end, to destroy the power of logical and active thinking.

Another form of dissipation, growing upon us as a people to-day, is in reading nothing but cheap magazines. I believe in inexpensive literature—that the best books should be brought within the reach of the humblest purse; but when cheapness of price and general accessibility go along with cheapness of quality the result is disastrous. I was told by the editor of one of the most widely sold American magazines that it was no use to give the American public a serious article between the first of April and the first of October. I do not believe the statement; but he says it is true, and he sells his magazine—amazingly. If even a fraction of the indictment is true, think what it means: between the first of

April and the first of October, lie the months when we might read serious articles—most of us. It is the dull season in business, the general period of vacations; and yet our intellectual caterer tells us that when we might read serious articles we will not, but prefer intellectual dissipation. After all, it is books above our level that educate us. Books on our level flatter us, make us think we are wise when we are not, while books above our level act as a challenge to the intellect. One who comes back even from an unsuccessful wrestle with the *Divine Comedy* or the second part of Goethe's *Faust* will find whole acres of modern literature no longer tempting to him; he has grown past their need and service.

A third form of intellectual dissipation is found to-day in public lectures. These may be made a most helpful form of public education, extending opportunities of culture to people already in the business of life. It is the one who

gives the lecture, however, who gets the main education from it (which is some compensation in the lecturer's harassing vocation); and if the one who listens to the carefully prepared thought of another is to receive anything like the same culture as the one who is thinking on his feet, the mind of the hearer must work on the same plane of intellectual activity with the one who speaks, and not be a mere recipient sponge into which the waters (?) of the intellect enter only to pass out again. Moreover, for each hour of listening, even active listening, to the carefully formulated thought of another, there should be at least two hours of hard study and thought at home. Only on these conditions can public lecture work be made other than one more polite form of dissipation.

Thus one may dissipate in the most beautiful things, in art, in music, poetry, love, religion. Wherever emotional stimulation is received without finding

expression in action, an inner ferment results that leaves the last state of the man worse than his first. One may shed so many tears over the imaginary characters of novels that one's eyes are dry towards the people who starve, physically or spiritually, in the next street. One may see so constantly imaginary characters on the stage, without ever making the connection between the symbol and the real life the drama symbolizes and interprets, that one loses sympathy for the same sufferings in the actual world. Wherever the beauty of the arts is sought as a mere selfish indulgence and the stimulus from it finds no expression in bettered action, the result is a very refined but most positive deterioration in moral character.

Professor James has said it in his admirable whimsical way in the ethical sermon he calls a chapter on Habit in his *Psychology:* "Even the habit of excessive indulgence in music, for those who

are neither performers themselves nor musically gifted enough to take it in a purely intellectual way, has probably a relaxing effect upon the character. . . . The remedy would be, never to suffer one's self to have an emotion at a concert, without expressing it afterward in *some* active way. Let the expression be the least thing in the world—speaking genially to one's aunt, or giving up one's seat in a horse-car, if nothing more heroic offers—but let it not fail to take place." The idea is not a jest: do you ever listen to beautiful music without a certain exaltation of spirit, a feeling that now you could really achieve the ideal of which you have always dreamed? If you do go home and fail to express that powerful appeal in some form of helpful action, you would distinctly better not have gone to the concert.

One may apply the thought even to religion. You go to church on Sunday. The music puts you into a receptive, med-

itative mood. The minister says something that touches your mind and heart. You go away saying that you feel "good." If you put off that good feeling with your Sunday gown or coat for the six days that follow, you would distinctly better not have gone to church. The good feeling was simply so much inspiration to helpful action, and when not embodied in conduct tends to a dissipation of the energies of character.

There is a closed circle psychologically between reception and expression; and we break that circle habitually only with grave moral as well as other risk. Every stimulus from the world of sensation passes along some nerve-tract to a sensor center of the brain, over to a motor center, and out along some other nerve-tract to expression. Your friend enters the room, and you spring to your feet, while a smile comes to your face; or, you slip on a banana-peel and fall, and a pained look comes to your face and pos-

sibly tears to your eyes. To be sure, we learn often to inhibit the more normal expression and switch off the stimuli to other channels. One doesn't always smile (unless one is a Japanese) no matter who enters the room, and the fallen wayfarer learns to inhibit the tears that might shame him to the passer-by. Yet the closed psychological circle remains, and when one habitually switches off the most powerful emotional and intellectual stimuli from the field of active expression in conduct, one becomes a Hamlet or Amiel in whom noble feelings and ideas effervesce—brilliantly, it is true, but with little effective application to life.

Indeed, one may dissipate even in service of others, if one responds to every whimsical appeal from without, with no attention to the central aim of life. For example, suppose that you are a schoolteacher, engaged in the work of controlling and guiding twenty, thirty, forty,

sometimes (mistakenly enough) even more little minds, each with energy running off in every channel; your aim being not to suppress activity but to direct it so that at the end of the day something significant has been attained. It is work so exhausting that it is no wonder the teacher goes home at night utterly tired out, ready to sink into bed in the sleep of nervous exhaustion. But there are those hundred spelling-papers to be gone over and corrected and underlined with red ink! Now it is a good thing to examine spelling-papers: it is paying tithes of mint, anise and cummin, and there are times when such tithes should be paid. Sometimes, indeed, one must examine spelling-papers, owing to the unwisdom of some superior official, when in the nature of the case it would be better not to do so; but there are times when one can get out of it and when it is right to do so. Suppose you examine those spelling-papers and care-

fully underline the faulty words with red ink, and return to the school-room in the morning so on edge with nervous weariness that the children are at once on edge also and seeking opportunities for disobedience: do you imagine you can teach anything? Suppose for once you were to take those spelling-papers and put them into the fire—let them be if not "thoughts that breathe," at least "words that burn"! Go out under the stars, hunt up your friend or read the last novel, go to bed early and sleep soundly with a clear conscience all night long. Then indeed one might return to the school-room in the morning feeling that teaching is not such miserable work after all, rather liking children, interested somewhat in the day's activities: then indeed one may teach something. It is the old lesson: "these ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone." One must pay tithes of mint, anise and cummin, but not to the extent of neglecting the

weightier matters of the law; and among the weightiest of all weighty matters of the law in any vocation, for one who hopes to achieve something worth while, is to be a sane, balanced, wise man or woman, living steadily toward some central aim. Thus, for one who hopes, in either work or play, to achieve something significant, dissipation—the wasting of one's capital stock—must, in any aspect of life, be rigorously excluded.

For those who would use the margin, whether in work or play, so as to convert it into the capital of character, intelligence and power there are certain closing suggestions. Some part of the margin should be spent in following one definite intellectual interest continuously through the years. It is amazing what an influence on the whole intellectual and moral life such an interest consecutively followed will contribute, even when the time devoted to it is very brief. Fifteen minutes a day, or a half-hour three times

a week, devoted to one definite study, will make one a master in that field in a dozen years. Such work is sowing seed corn in the furrow of daily life, which will bear fruit far beyond the original planting. Not the least valuable result of such study is the unifying and ordering of the intellectual life, so that each event and experience is brought into place and relation and made to yield its own contribution to the whole.

Further, in these days of severe pressure and over-hasty action, some part of the margin should be spent in cultivating the lost art of solitude and meditation. To see how studiously people strive to avoid being alone is to be led to believe that they fear something vacant or terrible when they are alone. Yet to live well, one must be friends with oneself; for we gather in solitude the strength and balance that enable us to return helpfully to the world. Emerson put it, "Men descend to meet." Certainly,

ideal society is limited to two; when a third enters, the plane of conversation becomes lighter and less earnest; and the only way in which a roomful of people can discuss serious questions is by temporarily resolving itself into two: one who for the time being speaks and one who listens. Even then the speaker can voice what is deepest in his heart only if he speak to the ideal appreciative listener, who may not be present at all.

Another part of the margin should be spent in cultivating the all but lost art of friendship. We have much society, but little friendship; yet it is the close personal associations that give vitality and depth to life. One of the strangest perversities of human nature is that which leads us to give our best selves to the people who count least, and to consider ourselves justified in spending our meanness and irritation on those we love best and who are most deeply influenced

by our lives. We put on our best dress morally, as well as physically, and strive to meet at high-water mark the stranger within our gates; and then we are inclined to remove both types of garment when we turn to the members of our family circle and the friends most intimately bound to our lives. If you have twenty letters to answer, you are apt to begin with the one from the person you know least, and leave your intimate friend's letter unanswered at the bottom of the pile because he will understand. To be sure, he will understand, but is it not mean to take it out of him because he does? If we could not be courteous all the time (which might be possible) would it not be better to spend our discourtesy on the stranger within our gates, who comes and goes and does not care so much, and save every finest flower of courtesy for those whose lives are often lifted or broken by our chance action or word? It is true one does not want to

wear Sunday clothes all the time, and it is one of the beautiful joys of personal life that we may rest back quietly on the loving appreciation of those who stand nearest us; but one should never appear in moral undress before the intimate associates of one's life. Courtesy is the atmosphere of personal life, covering the bare rocks of human reality with a garment of living beauty. It is impossible to live in hard contact with those bare, unclothed realities; and one high use of the margin is to enable us to cultivate the atmosphere of courtesy that enables us to recover the art of friendship in personal life.

There is one friend available in the margin of life who never intrudes on our moods, but is always ready to respond: this great, beautiful, sublime Nature-mother, who knows when to speak and charm us with the music of her countless voices; and who knows when her human child, tired with the work of the long

day, asks only the sweet peace he finds on her breast. Some part of the margin should be spent in responding to the exalting and calming influences of the Nature-world.

What is true of the influence of Nature applies also to human art. The greatest value of the fine arts lies, not in any lesson they may teach, nor even in the soothing memories of beauty they may leave with us, but in the exalting power they exercise over the human spirit. Through those creations of art which represent the highest achievement of the spirit of man we are lifted out of the submerging stream of daily events and enabled to look down on the plain of life from the mountain-heights, with wide perspective and calm vision. Herein indeed lies the supreme service of art to the spirit of man. To climb Dante's sheer peak and look off from its cold isolation; to wander among the tangle of mountains of Goethe's genius;

to look off from the summits of Shakespeare's art, with now a wild reach of Alpine splendor and now a quiet valley, sun-lit and filled with warm life, opening to our gaze; to feel the storm upon the Himalayan heights of Beethoven; and watch the light and shadow play over the forest-clad peaks of Michael Angelo; —is it not to get the distance of the spirit in relation to the overwhelming mass of details filling our daily lives?

If then we will habitually use in such ways the margin that is ours to spend as we please, shall we not increase immeasurably the capital, in character, intelligence and appreciation, of our lives? We may hope then to be lifted out of the routine of daily existence into wide unity with the best in nature and man. The deepened capacities of spirit will bring an added return through all that we experience in our business and in the relations we sustain to others. Thus shall we grow in power to fulfill the true vocation of

man—noble living, and find unfailing and increasing joy and interest in ever learning the never finished art of life.

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